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BEFORE ME, the undersigned authority, on this day personally appeared _____, known to me to be the person whose name is subscribed to the foregoing instrument, and acknowledged to me that he executed the same for the purposes and consideration therein expressed.

My commission expires _____

WITNESS my hand and seal of office this _____ day of _____, 20____.

CONFLICTS AND ADJUSTMENTS OF PORTUGUESE
YOUTH IN SCHOOL, HOME, AND COMMUNITY

BY ANA MARIA COELHO

Since the early 60's Portuguese immigrants have left their humble surroundings to take up a new life in Canada. The decision to become an immigrant in a foreign land is not an easy one.

Immigration to, and migration within, a new country is more than mere physical change. Special problems of transition are faced by people who have moved from a rural class background of limited opportunity, low educational standards and authoritarian family, state and religious life.

The conflict of opposing traditions and ways of life is an especially difficult issue for many young people. Accustomed to highly structured family, church and social environments, they find themselves torn between contradictory demands of becoming Canadian or remaining Portuguese.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze some of the problems which young Portuguese people face in their confrontation with school, home and community.

Most of this paper will be with reference to the Portuguese community of Cambridge (Galt), Ontario.

The paper's format is as follows:

- I. Introduction - The introduction will give an account of the place of origin with some details of cultural background. This is essential in order that one may get a better insight into the constant struggle in the transitional efforts.
- II. Problems - This section will deal mostly with the problems that the young people encounter, and how they have adjusted to some of these conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

Portugal is a short story: a compact country with a variety in limited space; a country where a pre-industrial and pre-enlightened civilization is still intermittently functioning.

The true economic miracles of Portuguese history really belonged to the age before the machine. It has made no real contribution to a post-industrial world.

Portugal is still a poor country. Most of the people work on the land and some samples of great engineering and building contrast strongly with the simple ways of peasants, who seem to be quite unspoiled and often still prefer to go about barefoot though they may be earning better money and have electricity in their cottages.

In short, Portugal has not escaped modern industrial civilization which often threatens to reduce the diversity of the forms of human life to a sad, monotonous uniformity.

Portugal has a low standard of living and a government which does not allow a popular share in administration.

Thousands of people each year leave their simple surroundings. They emigrate for a variety of reasons whose common denominator is a desperate determination to improve their economic situation; and most are lacking in skills and education. The total effects of these factors, coupled with a strong administration of the effects of North American material prosperity, has given the Portuguese group an intense determination to become part of a society which has produced material marvels. Their lack of familiarity with English and their difficulty in adjusting to the local social and cultural system slow down their integration and they necessarily maintain their ethnic culture in the meantime.

Adults are not the only ones who encounter difficulties in adjusting to the new surroundings. The children of these families who emigrate are often the victims of frustration and anxiety when it comes to adjustment. The hardest area of adjustment is often the school environment. Other problems may arise as a result of those initiating from the school. The following subject material will outline some of these conflicts which a youngster may encounter when placed in a strange educational environment. An analysis of related conflicts will also be presented.

In order that one may understand why a Portuguese child may not adapt to the Canadian school system, it would only be appropriate to give a brief description of the system in which he was reared.

In Portugal the elementary school course lasts six years. Children begin at the age of seven, and attend eight hours a day (8:00 - 12:00 noon and 1:00 - 5:00 p.m.) six days a week from the first of October until the end of June. There is no kindergarten in Portuguese schools. After elementary school they may choose from three streams of education in secondary school as Canadians do, the academic, commercial and technical. Secondary education is not free in Portugal.

Until recently, on both the mainland and the Azores, only members of the upper class could read and write fluently. Today, however, there is room for all in Portugal's public schools and just recently the minimum program for Portuguese children was expanded from four to six years.

As one may expect in an authoritarian country the school system is highly structured and discipline is strict. Comparatively few students go on to secondary school, particularly in the Azores where a student may have to travel far from home. Many boys seek full time employment at an early age. Once they have finished elementary school, girls are expected to help within the home environment. The high structure and discipline often creates a feeling of resentment towards the system, in many students.

The total educational system is controlled from Lisbon and unlike Canada, there is little or no provincial or local autonomy with respect to educational needs.

PROBLEMS

On arrival in Canada, most children are thrust into the school system at the first grade level with no age consideration. Often a child is placed in a primary grade though academically and emotionally he might be above that grade level. Acquisition of language is the criterion for placement. For example, when our family arrived in Canada in 1957, we were all placed in a separate school. My sister and I were placed in grade one. This was fine since we had no educational experience behind us. However, my brother, who was eleven and was in his last year of elementary school in the Azores was placed in grade two. He was totally discouraged with the whole thing. Here the kids were colouring, adding and subtracting. He was quite ahead

of them. He already knew how to write, multiply and divide. The result was total disillusionment and boredom. He was often the victim of mischievous behaviour and was penalized for it. However he managed to struggle on. He was 21 when he graduated from high school. He is now thankful that he did continue, but he still recalls those days and often remarks how he felt like a shepherd with his herd of lambs around him. He made it, but many didn't.

This means of placement has since been altered. Today a child coming in to the school is placed in a grade according to his age level. Very few who arrive after the age of 16 are registered in school. The exception is perhaps if they were in a higher mode of education at home; this being high school or trade school.

Language is still the largest drawback. Often schools are not equipped with teachers who can cope with these children.

Gradually, schools are recognizing the needs of these children and are experimenting with special programs. They are incorporating remedial reading classes and special English classes are held for Portuguese students twice a week. They are even considering conducting classes in Portuguese with English being introduced slowly. However, a lack of qualified staff is impeding the progress of this proposal. The answer may not be in this particular program, but the indication is that schools are making positive efforts to give these children equal opportunities to reach some goal in their lives.

The indication that immigrants are experiencing special learning difficulties is present. They are usually reading below their grade level and their language is also deficient. This is not through their own doing. Quite often the teacher does not recognize this and uses vocabulary too advanced for the child to comprehend. Difficult vocabulary, instruction which is too fast-paced and previously acquired subject matter is often what the child is forced to cope with. As a result his simplest solution is to give up.

Another major problem concerning immigrant children is discipline. Their realization of lax classroom control often creates problems for the teacher. The teacher is often not prepared for the problems which may occur as a result. The child finds himself freed from the highly structured, strict classroom atmosphere. He then proceeds to test this freedom. Often in this experimentation the child becomes almost totally unmanageable. As a result

of the child's behaviour and/or the teacher's experience, he is isolated from class activities and his peers. He rebels once more and the teacher may never regain his confidence. At this point parents must be contacted and an interpreter explains the situation. The problem then becomes the parents' responsibility. The child often fears his parents and will then co-operate with the teacher.

Most Portuguese parents have spent less than four years in school. Yet, although their outlook on life is traditional, most want to give their children the benefit of a future in a new land. What they often fail to realize is that their children's future may include assimilation to the Canadian way of life and a disregard for Portuguese tradition. The problem of transition is essentially twofold: a change from rural to urban and the conflict between two cultures.

Consequently, the problem faced by the school is not only second language learning, but a social and psychological problem. It is suggested that the teaching of English may inhibit proficiency in the native tongue, and that the student may then be in conflict with what is occurring within his home and community.

The Portuguese concept of the family, with its reciprocal rights and obligations, has been transplanted here. Proud and sensitive, the Portuguese are also resourceful. Their strong family is the spur that makes them self-supporting. The newcomers find it hard to understand the airy dismissal of family commitments by some Canadians.¹

This often presents a problem for the child as he grows up and becomes aware of his shelteredness from the outside world. He recognizes his self-commitments to the family. His total world revolves around two centres, home and school. He begins to regret this commitment to the family. He yearns for independence and self-identity. This often is the basis for a family split. The family does not identify with this and sees the child as being disrespectful to his family. He is quite often shunned not only by his family but by other Portuguese citizens of the community. It can almost be compared to the same reaction as Neil describes in his book Summerhill. Upon arrival the children encounter a freedom which they have never possessed. Although there is no authoritarian figure, the child's behaviour can parallel. He exploits every

¹ The Globe Magazine, April 1960

bit of freedom, but with time he becomes bored with his new freedom. He then proceeds to take part in the activities made available to him. As in Summerhill (the school), the immigrant child finally comes to grips with himself. He has explored this freedom and begins to co-operate with the teacher and his peers.

Today Galt school officials are particularly concerned about the drop-out problems among Portuguese children. There are many requests for work permits for children between the ages of 14 and 16. Often the child is quite anxious to remain in school. The main reason is that parents feel that the children should supplement the family's income. Children, to the Portuguese, are part of the family working unit and income. They usually are expected to turn over their complete pay cheque until they plan to marry. The tragedy of it all is that some of these children are very ambitious and talented. Many are university material but their whole future is risked because of family selfishness, not necessarily financial need. The father would much rather have a large figure in his bankbook and materialistic wealth, than scholarly children.

There is no definite solution to this problem. Consultation has been the main method of trying to overcome it. But it often proves to be unsuccessful.

One writer expresses this issue by stating:

Growing children are in full revolt against customs, sometimes with tragic consequences. Parents see only disgrace and shame in the new freedom of the new land. Daughters are accused of promiscuity and often beaten senseless, often resulting in families splitting.²

Often the parents feel that their children are picking up ideas from Canadian schoolmates. For example, the girls may want to attend parties to which both boys and girls would be invited. The Portuguese girl would be denied permission to attend. The parents are determined that they should uphold traditional customs.

Portuguese tradition centres around the double standard in most aspects of life. The double standard for the sexes is much more pronounced than in Canada. Women go out to work as they have not done before, but otherwise their lives are still very sheltered. A respectable woman does not go out in the evening unless accompanied by a family member. Young men have much

² Correll, the Toronto Daily Star, June 7, 1969

more freedom than young women. There is no dating.... courtship is carried on under the eyes of parents parental consent to marriage is essential.³ The child does not always accept this double standard and again family conflict arises.

Children are highly valued in the Portuguese home. The child's loyalties are first to the home, and then to school, work and community. As previously mentioned, the child is often removed from school to assist the family financially. Also the child is often called upon to interpret for the parents. Parents take children with them to clinics, on shopping expeditions, to business and government offices. As a result the child often misses many days of school in order to accompany their parents.

At home a large responsibility is given to the girl. Quite often the mother is working and the girl is expected to do the housework for the whole family and care for siblings, which often interferes with homework. Also, provision is not made for the child to do his homework and he has to resort to the kitchen table with no privacy to concentrate on his studies.

One common conflict between the old and new cultures is often the cause of discord in the family. Children become better educated than their parents and can move more freely and comfortably in the new community. They adopt the dress, customs and habits of the new country and often the parents, who prefer the old ways, feel that their children are becoming strangers to them. They exert pressures on their children to make them maintain Portuguese traditions and to mingle socially with their own group. Consequently children become rebellious, discard parental controls and standards of conduct.

The teacher who works with immigrant youth must be continuously made aware of the barriers and communication gaps which reinforce conflicts in the school and home. The troubles faced by the newcomer and his family must be understood if effective assistance is to be offered. An understanding of the ways in which his background differs from the Canadian mode is the essential starting point for such an awareness.

Many of the conflicts discussed in this paper have some hope of being resolved. Others will continue to exist for many decades to come. The young immigrant must

³Ferguson, *Newcomers in Transition*, Toronto International Institute, 1967, p. 49.

cope with them or revolt against them in order that he may find his own peace of mind. As one who has been put through the grind mill, I can honestly say that I cannot deduce any magic solution. As with every other issue in this world there must be a compromise somewhere to eliminate some of the conflicts.

But there is a spark of hope, for culture is not a static entity. It is in a state of perpetual change. No matter how diligently a human group may seek lands which are precisely the same as those from which it came, success can only be partial. No piece of land is exactly the same as a second, any more than one man is the exact duplicate of another. Migrants make adjustments in their new environments, and in so doing create new values and attributes.

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on this report in order to be able to make this report
the most complete and accurate one possible. It is
therefore requested that you make every effort to
provide the necessary information as soon as possible.
The information should be provided in the form of a
written report and should be submitted to the
Director of the Department of the Environment.

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